

# Gail's Gardens

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Someone asked me the other day "What is the most common design mistake you see new gardeners make?" This really got me thinking. Of course there are as many answers to that question as there are gardeners, but I do see some mistakes repeated over and over when I visit peoples' gardens.

I think the most frequent design mistake I see is the tendency to buy and plant just one of any plant. One plant by itself looks lonely: it needs company of its own kind! So buy 3, or 5, or more, of the same plant and group them together in the garden: they will make a much bigger impact visually. If you really like the plant, create several groups in different areas of the garden: designers call this 'repetition', and it's a sure way to draw the eye around the garden creating a sense of cohesiveness and organization. Avoid that 'patchwork quilt' look that can happen when you use too many different plants. I often find that I can design a very successful garden with only about a dozen different plants, repeating and grouping them around the area.

Of course, you may not want, or be able to afford, to buy multiples of every new plant that catches your eye at the nursery. So consider buying one plant, living with it for a year so that you are confident it will do well for you, and then buying more the next year (hopefully you will remember where to get it!). Another option is to propagate more plants from cuttings of your original plant. Not all, but many plants, can be successfully grown from softwood cuttings taken at the end of summer: join me at Bassignani's Nursery in October for a fun class on "Growing Your Own".



The other design mistake I see very commonly is trying to make a garden of 'single season plants'. This is so easy to do if you are easily seduced at the nursery! Nurseries will always place their most colorful blooming plants at the front to catch your eye, but many of these are

annuals or herbaceous perennials with very short bloom seasons. Although spectacular in their prime, these plants will leave a "hole" in your garden for the majority of the year, with only wilting foliage (or no foliage at all) to show where they have been. Instead of being seduced by these short-season bloomers, seek out and use evergreen plants which can provide bloom as well as foliage interest throughout the year. Designers refer to these plants as the 'bones' of the garden, and they form a skeleton that gives shape and interest to the garden in all seasons.

Some of my personal favorite plants for 'bones' are hebe, escallonia, rosemary, lavender, ceanothus, and nandina (heavenly bamboo). They are all easy, drought tolerant, and have attractive evergreen foliage. They have beautiful flowers in different seasons, and each is available in many cultivars for a variety of color and size options.

I hope that you will be able to use these two major design principles of 'repetition' and 'bones' to grow your garden into a more cohesive, year-round beauty. If you need help analyzing your garden's weaknesses and strengths, just give me a call: I am available for brief consultations or complete re-designs for a more beautiful, easy-care garden.



**Don't miss the chance to learn all wonderful ornamental grasses for your garden on Saturday August 22 at 10:30 am at Bassignani's Nursery.**

Do you have a gardening question you would like to ask?

Send your questions and photos (jpg) to bluehilldesign9@aol.com.

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## Gardening

**Aug 16 ~ Permaculture Site Tour** ~ Organic & bio-intensive gardens, seedsaving program, watershed & wildland restoration work, & "natural" building methods. *Recommended:* sturdy shoes, hat, drinking water. \$10 by donation. 9:00-Noon at Occidental Arts & Ecology Center, 15290 Coleman Valley Road ~ 707-874-1557 x201 ~ www.oaec.org

**Free Gardening Demonstrations** ~ presented by Gail Fanning of Blue Hill Garden Design, 10:30 am at Bassignani's Nursery, 1841 Gravenstein Highway S, Sebastopol ~ 707-823-3984 or 707-829-2455 ~ www.bluehilldesign.shorturl.com

**Aug 22 ~ Ornamental Grasses for the Fall Garden**

**Sept 12 ~ Fall Vegetables Now!**

**Sept 26 ~ Summer Rose Care**

**Aug 22-23 ~ Plant Sale** ~ Hundreds of varieties of heirloom brassicas, lettuces/greens, chards, leeks, & herbs + old-fashioned annual flowers. Perennials, too! Free admission. 9:00-5:00, tours at 11:00 & 1:00. Occidental Arts & Ecology Center, 15290 Coleman Valley Road, Occidental ~ 707-874-1557 x201 ~ www.oaec.org

**Aug 29 ~ Community Seed Exchange** ~ The West County Community Seed Bank invites all interested gardeners to share

locally grown, open pollinated, pesticide & GMO-free seeds, plants, resources & local gardening information. 10:00-1:00 pm at Salmon Creek School Garden, 1935 Bohemian Hwy, Occidental ~ Sara McCamant, 707-829-5234 or saramc@emaldearth.org

**Aug 29, 30 ~ Bonsai Show & Sale** ~ Displays, demonstrations, auctions & sales. Presented by the Redwood Empire Bonsai Society. Free admission & parking! Sat 10:00-5:00, Sun 10:00-4:00 at Veterans' Memorial Building, 1351 Maple Avenue, Santa Rosa ~ 707-884-4126 ~ www.rebsbonsai.org

**Aug 29, Sept 19 ~ Plant Sale** ~ Perennials & Unusuals! 3' Red Lace Leaf Maple, \$25! We accept plant containers for reuse. Rain does *not* cancel. \$1-\$10. 9:00-2:00 at Willowside School Nursery, 5285 Willowside Rd at Hall Rd, Santa Rosa ~ Jan Lochner, 707-569-4724 ~ www.oakgroveunionschools.org

**Gardening Classes** ~ with Sonoma County Master Gardeners. Free. 10:30am-12:30pm at Harvest for the Hungry Garden, 1717 Yulupa Avenue Santa Rosa ~ 707-566-7937 ~ www.harvestgarden.org

**Aug 29 ~ Healing Gardens & Horticultural Therapy**

**Sept 26 ~ Great Herbs to Grow for Fall & Winter Gardens**

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